

LEARNING CURVE **PERSPECTIVE****DZULKIFLI
ABDUL RAZAK**

DR Azizi Aiyub Ghazali (1934-2015) was no ordinary name to Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), and the pioneering batch of students in particular.

He was founding director of USM Clinic (1973-1989) created to cater for the healthcare of the university community. The clinic was housed in a former female hostel (Block 95) which used to be part of a mortuary before the campus was established. A pharmacy undergraduate and a student leader then, I was privileged to have the opportunity to get to know Dr Azizi — his philosophy and attitude towards health and life — at close range.

Trained as a "Western" medical practitioner, Dr Azizi was not straitjacketed by the profession. His mindset went beyond the regular Western perspective. He saw the complementarity between modern and traditional practices. To him, no one system could completely deal with the myriad illnesses and diseases, what more in a university populated by active adolescents who were game to experience anything once! So the busy doctor had his hands full, especially when exam fever struck and various maladies ranging from simple headaches to more severe psychosomatic ailments showed up. At times, when assignments and term papers were overdue, medical certificates were resorted to as the only foolproof alibis, but not in the books of Dr Azizi.

Despite all these challenges, he always wore a smile. He was aware that his well-being as a medical practitioner could be very infectious to patients. Needless to say, he was a popular doctor because he engaged with patients, and took time to get to know them, even

A doctor ahead of his time

**Pusat Sejahtera in USM.**

before discussing their medical condition. In many cases, patients left the clinic without any medication, but happy with just sound advice on how to live a good, balanced life. Dr Azizi was atypical for not prescribing pills, and his patients were trained not to expect any. His philosophy was holistic and people-orientated rather than the usual reductionist-type of modern practice of treating the "illness" and not the patient.

In the early 70s, Dr Azizi's approach was unique at a time when complementary medicine was almost unheard of, or at least looked down in contempt. However, to the good doctor, "holistic medicine" is nothing new given his deeper understanding of traditional medical practices where the "person" is more important than his "illnesses". In fact, the latter is a sign of

"weakness" in the person who allows it to be manifested externally. I came to learn that the "stronger" (especially spiritually) the person, the more he is able to subjugate impending "illnesses" except, perhaps, for old age — even then it could defer for a much longer period of time. This has everything to do with the way the human person balances his attitude towards life holistically. Dr Azizi was particular about this, amply demonstrated by his physique and composure. He subscribed to the notion of total wellness — that later became closely identified with the university tagline, *sejahtera*, at the turn of the century. It became an overarching framework in the drive towards sustainability and balance.

This opens up yet another facet that Dr Azizi was well-recognised for — his inclination for natural

products. He was not only well versed in them (unlike many modern health practitioners) but also promoted their use as supplements for balanced healthcare. He advocated herb gardens of essential plants in housing compounds or within the campus, making them easily accessible without having to depend on unscrupulous traditional practitioners. This also drove the research agenda on natural products that USM was later known for. In this sense, he was a truly medical practitioner with unflinching interest in the welfare of the community. It was not surprising that he occasionally "dreamt" of a "special" plant meant for a particular purpose. This would set him on a trip to track down the plant. I went with him on one such adventure that remained both mystifying and illuminating. It took us to Setiu in

**Dr Azizi Aiyub Ghazali in the 1980s.**

Terengganu to successfully realise the dream after a very hectic search. We excitedly identified the plant and photographed (before the days of digital cameras) it as evidence of a "new" species — only to be surprised that the plant was just a blank "space" when the photograph was processed!

These are among the many incidences that make up the legacy of this extraordinary healer whose wisdom is far-reaching. He died peacefully last week, having shaped a "true" meaning of health. In 2009, USM redesignated the clinic as Pusat Sejahtera in recognition of its first director. Let us pray that he is always in the state of *sejahtera*.

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